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SCIENCE

FRIDAY, APRIL 4, 1913

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PLEISTOCENE
MOLLUSKS¹

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IN the investigation of natural problems the most conspicuous or bulkiest character does not always furnish the most convincing evidence. We readily see the mass of diatomaceous earth, but we do not understand its gritty quality, nor can we appreciate its origin until we have studied the minute, individually almost negligible frustules which make it up; sandstones or limestones may form great cliffs, but it requires the comparatively insignificant fossil to finally reveal the origin and the place of the rock. Similarly, in the study of the Pleistocene we encounter gross features which have their value—we find variously comminuted and diversely arranged materials in great bulk; we find topographic and physiographic characters on a large scale; yet the best evidence which we have concerning the conditions under which certain parts of the Pleistocene formations were deposited is furnished by the fossils which usually form a small and not always conspicuous part of the deposits.

Both plant and animal fossils have been found in the various subdivisions of the Pleistocene. The former consist chiefly of the leaves and wood of gymnospermous and angiospermous trees and shrubs, mosses and diatoms; the latter of some insects, a conspicuous, though limited, mammalian fauna, and the mollusks which form the most widely distributed and most universally present group of all.

¹Address of the vice-president and chairman of Section E—Geology and Geography—American Association for the Advancement of Science, Cleveland, 1912.

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